

Golfers poll: 2004 looks like a rebounding year

Golfers surveyed in a recent National Golf Foundation (NGF) poll indicate that 2004 may be a rebounding year for the golf industry.

For its "Outlook on Play Frequency" report, the NGF surveyed 350 golfers in December. Across-the-board the respondents predicted they would play more rounds of golf this year than in 2003.

The most rounds in 2004 are expected

to come from players who are 60 years old or older and have played for 30 years or more; players who score 85 or less; and private-club members. However, the highest percentage increase is surprisingly expected from less skilled, less experienced and less frequent players. NGF's message to courses – pick one or more target groups of these golfers and vigorously pursue them.

Respondents were labeled as "best cus-

tomers" if they played 25 rounds or more per year, or have household golf-related annual spending of \$1,000. "Avid golfers" are those who averaged 52 rounds in 2003. As a group, avid golfers predicted they would play an average of 61 rounds this year. The report cautioned, "They may have been overzealous ... nevertheless, it's a positive outlook."

While taking a pulse on player intentions, the survey also identified ways to help golf course operators better market their facilities, including the following

- Younger people in the "avid golfers" group especially anticipated more rounds in 2004. So, to increase rounds, target younger high-handicappers.

- Many in the "best customers" group would prefer to play with family more than friends, but currently do not do so. The suggested solution: Create family-play programs.

- The top three things golfers like most about playing golf are challenge, outdoors/nature and its social aspect. Tip: Use these ideas in advertising and promotional materials for products and facilities.

- The top three things golfers dislike most about playing golf are slow play, playing poorly and poor etiquette by others. Tip: Begin to fight slow play and let golfers know you are doing so; invite golfers to take lessons; and educate golfers in etiquette through rangers, signage and group lessons.

- Better course condition is the primary factor that would get the best customers to visit their local course more frequently. Tip: Really need a tip?

Meanwhile, the NGF also asked golfers who played less than they wanted to in 2003, how many times they expect to play this year. This group encompassed 65 percent of the best customers, representing 5.8 million golfers nationally. If their hopes come true, it would mean an average increase of 12.9 rounds, which translates into an additional 74 million rounds.

The NGF stated: "If even half of these rounds were realized, the golf industry could regain many of the rounds 'lost' between 2001 and 2003." GCN

HOW MANY ROUNDS DID YOU PLAY IN 2003?
HOW MANY ROUNDS DO YOU WISH YOU COULD HAVE PLAYED IN 2003?
HOW MANY ROUNDS DO YOU EXPECT TO PLAY IN 2004?

(AMONG THOSE WHO SAID THEY PLAYED LESS THAN THEY WANTED TO IN 2003)

		2003 average rounds actual	2003 average rounds wish	2004 average rounds expected
Total		39.8	84.1	52.7
Age	18-49	37.8	85.0	48.0
	50-59	38.8	74.0	52.4
	60+	47.0	97.5	65.1
Average score	<85	53.6	107.5	69.8
	85-90	39.1	84.8	52.9
	>90	27.2	58.1	37.7
Years played	<15	37.8	82.9	51.4
	15-29	38.1	79.9	49.4
	30+	44.2	89.6	59.1
Rounds last 12 mos.	<30	16.1	45.1	26.9
	30-59	38.6	84.7	51.4
	60+	86.0	160.6	102.7
Household income	<\$75	35.4	82.9	51.2
	\$75-\$99	45.2	79.0	54.9
	\$100+	38.4	87.1	53.0
Private club member	Yes	47.3	83.0	69.6
	No	38.0	83.6	49.4

How to read this table: Private club members surveyed played 47.3 rounds in 2003, wish they could have played 83.0 rounds and realistically expect to play 69.6 rounds in 2004.